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ABSTRACT

For an instructor who is working to reconcile "collaboration" and "feminism" in composition studies, it is necessary to explore how this critical coupling provides potential conflicts in theories and pedagogical practices. The following three premises need to be explored: (1) feminist collaborative methods and theorizing may not be as new as some would like to believe; (2) feminist collaborative methods and theorizing may not be as freeing as some would like to believe; and (3) feminist collaborative methods viewed as critical or pedagogical givens may be a political mistake, especially where conflict is downplayed. With regard to the first premise, it is important to note that "collaboration" is not a notion that surfaced with the 1980s cachet of French feminism. Citing a work of Anne Rugles Gere and Mara Holt, Angela Lunsford and Lisa Ede argue that feminists must go back at least to the 19th century, if not to the Romans, to understand the ways in which "collaborative pedagogy" has provided women with an important tradition. With regard to the second premise, it should be noted that many theories of collaborative pedagogies replicate current humanist stereotypes of "the feminine" and of "authorship" more generally. "Collaboration," when claimed as a maternal feminist practice, inadvertently reinforces essentialist thinking. With regard to the third premise, it should be noted that "collaboration" could be seen as conservative, as presuming consensus or agreement. Feminists must learn to see conflicts as productive. (Contains 18 references.) (TB)

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Collaboration and Conflict in the Feminist Classroom

This paper is an attempt to theorize my nagging discomfort with feminist collaboration. In order to make such an argument, it feels necessary to parade my own fledgling credentials, my own (largely positive) experiences with feminist collaborations. I've collaborated twice on articles with feminist colleagues; I'm co-editing a book with a feminist mentor. In fact, this very paper is part of a co-authored work-in-progress. Mary Sullivan and I have been working collaboratively for some time on the articulation of feminism and collaboration. Despite all of the things collaboration has done to enrich my scholarly endeavors, however, I am not satisfied with stopping at celebration or at self-satisfaction. This paper is, for me, both troubling and part of "troubling-through."

That the topic of collaboration in composition studies is most often associated with the groundbreaking work of Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede will, I suspect, come as a surprise to few in this audience. Most of us are well aware of their widely-cited article "Rhetoric in a New Key: Women and Collaboration," in which they suggest that there are a number of modes of collaborative writing, not "a mode." The two modes that Lunsford and Ede outline as most worthy of note are 1) a hierarchical mode: that is "linearally structured, driven by highly specific goals, and carried about by people who play clearly assigned roles." They call this "conservative" and "predominantly masculine" (235). And 2) a dialogic mode that is not as widespread; it is "fluid" and

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words can't describe it (235). They say it is "potentially at least, deeply subversive" (236) and that it is "feminine," though not simply female.

Describing or theorizing about dialogic collaboration has become an increasingly important project in the five years since Lunsford and Ede's article was published, and their voices have been joined by others who are more explicit about labelling their theories of collaboration as "feminist." Carey Kaplan an Ellen Cronan Rose's 1993 Signs article, "Strange Bedfellows: Feminist Collaboration," "anatomizes, celebrates, and strives to theorize" their collaborative efforts (549). Although in "real life" not "lovers," Kaplan and Rose choose the metaphor "lesbian" "to describe what [they] experience in the connectedness of collaboration" (550). Another recent article that speculates about feminist collaboration--this time between "real life lovers"--is Susan J. Leonardi and Rebecca Pope's "Screaming Divas: Collaboration as Feminist Practice." Leonardi and Pope theorize the erotics of collaboration, being careful to avoid maternity models of which they've grown tired (262). They worry about "fusion or merging when the collaboration is two women, especially two lesbians," but they offer up a pleasure model for collaborative practice (268).

Each of these articles contributes to the much-needed theorizing of feminisms and collaboration, and each presents us with a series of provocative questions. Kaplan and Rose ask, "is our collaboration extraordinary, an accidental act of grace? Or has it been, could it be, reproduced? Is collaboration a peculiarly female and/or feminist mode of production? Our experience and the statements of other feminist collaborators would seem to suggest that feminists find collaboration particularly congenial. If so, why? Is women's collaboration a logical (or consciously elected) praxis of feminist theory or politics?" (557). Leonardi and Pope add their own provocative questions to this list: in what sense is collaboration itself resistance? should a really pc feminist collaboration replicate in its subjects its own collaborative practice (267) Are there differences in the collaborations of those whose entire lives are collaborative efforts and those women who

"want to respect the boundaries more carefully" (268)? Neither article reaches satisfactory answers to these questions, though each longs for a more concrete theorizing of feminist collaboration.

Both articles provide fertile ground for the consideration of feminist collaboration, but both assume from the outset that feminism and collaboration belong together, that this coupling brings about largely if not completely positive critical effects, and that collaboration is an essentially feminist practice. My aim in these remarks today is to suggest that perhaps we need to move these questions and these assumptions to another level. We might ask why is collaboration among women seen as of a different kind? To what extent can collaborative methods be grafted onto women or onto feminists? Why is collaboration among feminists viewed by some as the most valued method? What is gained and what is lost when we link feminism and collaboration in our composition theories and our classrooms?

In attempting to seek out ways to reframe the terms of the feminism and collaboration and to explore the ways in which this critical coupling provides us with potential conflicts in our theories and pedagogical practices, I will briefly explore three premises. 1) Feminist collaborative methods and theorizing may not be as new as we'd like to believe; 2) Feminist collaborative methods and theorizing may not be as freeing as we'd like to believe; and 3) Feminist collaborative methods viewed as critical or pedagogical givens may be a political mistake, especially where conflict is downplayed.

1) Feminist collaborative methods and theorizing may not be as new as we'd like to believe.

In her preface to the "Forum: On Collaborations" in the fall 1994 issue of Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature, Holly Laird suggests that: "Around 1991 scholars in literary studies began to turn their attention to the question of collaboration in feminist

scholarship and women's literature" (235). Laird outlines many panels at national conferences on the topic of feminist collaboration that occurred around this time, though she notes that "feminist scholars have been actively engage in collaborative work throughout the last two decades" (235). Though, as Laird puts it, "before 1991 there was little theorization of, and few attempts to reflect on, the practice and consequences of feminist coauthorship" (236). Laird does mention Lunsford and Ede's work, but her limiting of feminist collaboration in the first paragraph to feminist coauthorship by the end of this section is unfortunate. Certainly, in the scholarship of rhetoricians and compositionists "collaboration" and even "feminist collaboration" hold wider meanings.

Although I agree with Laird that feminism and collaboration have been insufficiently theorized, I think it is important to recall that "collaboration" is not a notion that surfaced with the 80s cachet of French feminism. Turning again to Lunsford and Ede, although this time to a far more recent article, we can see that the history of "collaboration" at least--if not of feminism and collaboration--has had a far richer history as a pedagogy and as a writing practice than we may first have thought. Citing from the work of Anne Ruggles Gere and Mara Holt, among others, Lunsford and Ede argue in "Collaborative Authorship and the Teaching of Writing" that we must go back at least to the nineteenth century--if not to the Romans--to understand the ways in which "collaborative pedagogy" has provides us with an important tradition (421). As they conclude:

> the drive toward radically individual autonomy, competitiveness, and isolated selfhood has always been countered, often only in a whisper but at other times in a louder, clearer voice, by a call for community, for shared public discourse, for working together for some common good. . . . we could write part of the history of writing instruction in the twentieth century in just such terms (424).

If one were to move outside of rhetoric and composition circles to literary studies, the work of Margaret J. M. Ezell on seventeenth-century British women authors' manuscript circulation might also be factored in. Collaborative methods are certainly not confined to historically emergent feminisms, but we can find many examples pre-1991 that we might be tempted to label feminist and collaborative.

2) Feminist collaborative methods and theorizing may not be as freeing as we'd like to believe.

Collaborative pedagogies and writing methods are often considered by feminists to be inherently non-patriarchal in that they avoid hierarchy, linearity, and romantic constructions of solitary authorship. However, upon closer examination, many theories of feminism and collaboration in fact replicate current humanist stereotypes of "the feminine" and of "authorship" more generally. I've already alluded to Leonardi's and Pope's dismissal of maternal models for feminist collaboration. The problems of conflating feminisms and mothering (much less composition and mothering) are perhaps fairly obvious. This pairing perpetuates the idea that all women mother or should mother--that reproduction is our primary function--and that our teaching should follow suit by being more nurturing and more collaborative.

Many have suggested the ways in which "motherhood" fails to constitute "us" women as smoothly as it might at first appear. Historically women refused these "essences" of the maternal, and maternal essences have failed to explain all "women." Furthermore, "collaboration," when claimed as a maternal feminist practice, has inadvertently reinforced these very "essences." I've written elsewhere about essentialisms in feminist composition theories; and the ground for the critiques of and the dangers involved in "risking essentialism" has been well traveled. I might add, however, that the same arguments that have Pope and Leonardi wavering about the applicability of

"maternity" to theories of feminist collaboration could just as easily apply to Kaplan and Rose's use of "lesbian." If this were the only danger--that of reinscribing so-called "feminine," "essentialist," and "subversive" qualities onto the methods and products of feminist collaborations--we might gloss over it as having been well-addressed in existing feminist theoretical scholarship by the likes of Mary Belenky, Drucilla Cornell, Diana Fuss, and Lynn Worsham.

I would argue, however, that the dangers of feminist collaborations are more far-reaching than the label "essentialist" suggests. As Lunsford and Ede note, "very little detail is known about collaborative writing processes in general. . . there is a need for in-depth study of the features of collaborative writing" (432). The ways in which this study has already occurred--as feminist case studies--shows us that feminists are in many ways adhering to patriarchal business-as-usual when it comes to describing the "difference" of their collaborative practices. For instance, many of the elaborations of feminist collaboration implicitly repeat romantic models of authorship--of writing as solitary (if not lonely); of composition as a mysterious process (if not divinely inspired); and finally, of competition.

Again, turning to the articles I outlined at the beginning of this piece as those which are most representative of the current state of theorizing on feminism and collaboration, we find plenty of protestations of difference in style and substance, but many instances of the same-old-humanist writing game in these collaborative efforts. First, the issue of writing as solitary. We hardly think of "collaboration" as being about monologism--it seems dialogical in its very nature--but the trope repeatedly used by feminist collaborative authors is that of reciprocity, sisterhood, and sameness. For instance, Kaplan and Rose describe their "strongly individual" friendship when they are not having "working weekends," but they suggest that when they do collaborate, they "set aside" pettiness, daily routines, and insistent individualities (556). Ironically, it is in setting aside their individualities that they replicate the model of writing as solitary.

Here, these two writers--seemingly without effort--meld into one. In another article from the Tulsa Studies issue on feminist collaboration, Joyce Elbrecht and Lydia Fakundiny's "Scenes from a Collaboration: or Becoming Jael B. Juba," the two authors often write as "one voice"--namely, a fictionalized persona who narrates their co-authored novel and who interviews them in their scholarly article. When looked at in this light, some single-authored texts might appear to us to be more collaborative than some multi-authored texts.

Along this same line, the composition process for feminist collaborators is often just as mystified as it is in more "patriarchal" and "humanist" conceptions of authorship. Another refrain in feminist collaborations is that of the "it just happened" or "we can't describe it." Kaplan and Rose "stumbled on collaboration almost by accident" (547). Or, in the words of Elbrecht and Fakundiny's persona, collaboration is the play of chance and necessity or of chaos. She concludes, "the cosmic web of collaboration makes working alone in the absolute sense impossible" (251). Here we may consider ourselves at the other extreme of the exception which almost in itself becomes the rule: if all writing is collaborative, the distinction of feminist collaboration would seem redundant and unnecessary.

The final lack of "freedom" that I would like to focus on here, however, is that of a freedom from competition. Individual writing is seen as a war-like undertaking, doing battle with other ("male") rhetors. Collaborative writing is seen as less competitive, less agonistic, less combative. Again, however, if we turn to Kaplan and Rose, we see that they--collaboratively--are doing what they claim feminist collaboration is not about: battling other feminists. As they put it:

> Although we were frequently scared and tentative, we groped toward empowerment. We became feminists. Our kind of collaboration may be the product of this specific history. Can today's young feminists, among them some of our junior women colleagues, understand our collaboration

> without having lived our history? What must it be like for junior women in a professional environment where competition with women seems inevitable? For all our sense of exclusion from the boys' club, we had solidarity with women. It was clearly us versus them. For today's junior faculty, "them" can be us. Sisterhood has given way to rivalry. (554-555)

Kaplan and Rose's collaboration can admit to an us/them combat with "the boys' club," but when it comes to their own "sisterhood," the cause for the conflict falls squarely on the shoulders of "the young" feminists. This feminist collaboration, it would seem, is collaboration in its secondary sense--a traitorous one in which young feminists collude with the boys. It would seem that only older feminists, who have solidarity with women, can have "feminist collaboration" in its positive, primary senses. Collaboration here appears less hierarchical, less pacifistic, less freeing indeed.

In this section, I have perhaps exaggerated the similarities among patriarchal, romantic models of writing and writers and those of feminist collaboration, but the comparisons should give us pause. We must recognize, according to Miriam Brody, that "[j]ust as the romanticized vision of the writer in the garret denied the social matrix of composition, the image of collaboration threatens to imagine the writer eternally merged with others, an embrace as confining as the masculine discourse had originally imagined" (214).

3) Feminist collaborative methods viewed as critical or pedagogical givens may be a political mistake, especially where conflict is downplayed.

We know that conflicts occur among feminists and non- or anti-feminists in our classrooms. We are less able to theorize these conflicts among feminists, as my discussion of Kaplan and Rose's article may begin to illustrate. I agree with those theorists who conclude that collaboration is "a political act with political consequences"

(Leonardi and Pope 259). But "political" should not be conflated with "progressive" here. As those of us who are familiar with the last decade of research on collaborative learning and with the critiques that have been made of these theories must know, collaborative learning can arguably be seen as conservative. When "collaboration" is seen to entail agreement or consensus, then feminist models of collaboration are subject to the very criticisms that John Trimbur has made of Kenneth Bruffee's work--that Bruffee's collaborative learning "runs the risk of limiting its focus to the internal workings of discourse communities and of overlooking the wider social forces that structure the production of knowledge" (Trimbur 603). In other words, collaborative learning can entail consensus without critique.

It might seem strange to suggest that feminists could possibly be accused of ignoring wider social forces. After all, that seems to be the one assumption that all feminists share--the need for social critique. However, the question becomes quite different when we realize the vast array of conflicting possible positions in a classroom--even one in which all the students sympathize with feminism. One springboard to explore the issue of conflict in feminist collaboration is Catherine Lamb's article "Beyond Argument in Feminist Composition." Lamb's article provides an indirect response to articles such as Olivia Frey's "Beyond Literary Darwinism," which comes down on the side of those who would expel argument from the feminist compositionists' repertoire. Lamb rightly questions the feminists' aversion to argument and attraction to autobiographical writing, saying that to limit ourselves to one model or the other is unfortunate.

In her article, Lamb is interested in describing what a "feminist" version of teaching argument might look like in the composition classroom. As Lamb defines it, argument must be "consistent with the emphasis on cooperation, collaboration, shared leadership, and integration of the cognitive and affective which is characteristic of feminist pedagogy" (11). This exploration took Lamb to the study of negotiation and

mediation; she concludes, "Argument still has a place, although now as a means, not an end. The end--a resolution of conflict that is fair to both sides--is possible even in the apparent one-sidedness of written communication" (11). Knowledge is now "seen as cooperatively and collaboratively constructed" and "power is experienced as mutually enabling" (21). Argument, for Lamb, downplays conflict or disagreement as much as possible.

Carol Stanger's work expresses a bit more skepticism than does Lamb's about the possibilities for feminist classroom structures that are non-hierarchical (43). Stanger, however, ultimately argues along with the likes of Lamb when she concludes, "in spite of this core of authority, there is not recourse to a single authority in a collaborative class. Instead, authority comes from a consensus among the groups and the teacher, the representative of a larger knowledge community" (43). For both Stanger and Lamb, feminist composition theory must be cooperative and collaborative. But is this enforcement largely positive or is it, perhaps, dangerous as well? To repeat my earlier question, what do we gain and what do we lose?

I do not want to close off this question. The issues I've raised would put the emphasis on "dialogism" and "collaboration" in feminist composition theories under serious contest; the dialogic classroom as inherently more feminist would have to be investigated. Regardless of whether collaboration or cooperation continue to be valued in our composition theories and classrooms (and I don't mean to suggest that these are "bad" methods or "faulty" educational tools), we should be wary about grafting these qualities on to women. It is the injunction that dialogism or collaboration equals feminism that creates problems. It is crucial for feminisms and for feminist composition theories to begin to see conflicts as productive and to envision our work as what Gayatri Spivak has called "persistent critique" (246). Such engagements with feminist conflict have appeared in the work of Susan Jarratt, among others. In this spirit of these critiques, feminist composition theorists must take a long, hard look at how we are utilizing

collaborative methods. If feminist composition theories do embrace a model for collectivity, it cannot be one that "assumes or mandates agreement," as David Shumway has argued (115). Collaboration and cooperation may continue to be seen as worthwhile feminist goals, but they can no longer be viewed as unwritten feminist or female givens in our scholarly endeavors or our classroom practices. Kaplan and Rose end their essay by asking, "Can there be a coherent theory of feminist collaboration?" (559). My tentative answer is "no"--feminism and collaboration do not "cohere." The location at which they cross paths is quite often productive, but it is always to be questioned, never merely assumed.

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